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Community Relations Minutes 06/18/2008

Approved Minutes

**Community Relations Subcommittee
June 18, 2008 – Meeting #3
-Minutes-**

In attendance: Jeff Thielman, Subcommittee Chair

Ron Spangler, Subcommittee Member

Sue Sheffler, Subcommittee Member

Brian Sullivan, Town Manager

Kevin J. O'Brien, Director, Department of Planning

David A. Berry, Assistant Director, Department of Planning

Andy West, Chair, Redevelopment Board

Rose Udics, parent

The meeting was called to order at 4:35 p.m.

1. The minutes of the June 2, 2008 meeting were approved. **Motion by Ron Spangler, second by Sue Sheffler. Approved 3-0.**

2. Parmenter/Crosby Schools discussion

• It was noted that on May 8, 2007 the School Committee (upon recommendation of the 2007-08 Community Relations Subcommittee) voted to declare the former Parmenter and Crosby elementary schools (located on Irving Street and Winter Street, respectively) surplus through June 30, 2011. The motion went on to say that the vote was taken “with the understanding that over the next 1-2 years, the town will examine the potential value of the buildings, and the school committee will examine the long-term school use of those buildings.” It was noted that the two studies were to be done in parallel, not sequentially.

• Mr. Thielman said that during the past several months discussions have taken place on the Capital Planning Committee (as evidenced by its report to Town Meeting this year), the School Facilities Working Group, and the Board of Selectmen indicating that proceeds from the sale of the Parmenter and Crosby schools could be used to generate revenue to make improvements in the Stratton and Thompson schools.

• Mr. Thielman disclosed that he may have a conflict of interest if and when there is a vote to declare the Parmenter surplus because his son is enrolled in the Arlington Children’s Center, which is located in that facility.

• Mr. Thielman said the Community Relations Subcommittee had called this meeting to a) gain an understanding of the process needed to ensure that proceeds from any sale of the building would be used for Thompson/Parmenter improvements; b) determine what the School Department needed to be doing to comply with the May 2007 motion; and c) understand what the Town Manager and/or Redevelopment Board was doing to examine the potential value of the buildings. It was also noted that some of the current tenants of the buildings might be interested in buying them.

• Additionally, both Sue Mazzarella and Supt. Levenson, who had initially planned to attend this subcommittee meeting but were unable to do so, were looking into trends in Kindergarten enrollment and the need for additional space. Currently the district has only about 2-3 spare classrooms at the elementary level. Furthermore, if up to 50 special education students who are now transported out of the district to receive specialized services are brought back to Arlington, in a plan to provide those services here while saving on skyrocketing transportation costs, the school department would need several more specialized classrooms to accommodate their needs for small-group (6-8 student) classes.

• Mr. Sullivan said he was reluctant to spend time and money on a study to determine the highest and best use of the properties until the School Committee voted the properties to be permanent surplus. He said his understanding was that the School Committee was going to determine if any or all space in the two schools was needed to house programs run by the Arlington Public Schools. If the school department did not anticipate needing the facilities, the School Committee, in his opinion, should simply vote to make the two facilities permanent surplus and turn them over to the Town for disposition. Mr. Sullivan pointed out

that once the buildings were declared permanent surplus by the School Department, control over their future use or sale would be out of their hands; it would be up to Town Meeting to decide on the disposition of the buildings and use of any sales proceeds.

• Mr. Spangler said that he would not urge his colleagues on the School Committee to take a vote to declare the properties surplus without a guarantee that proceeds would go to Thompson/Stratton improvements and without the public's having a clear understanding of the process and various scenarios. He also suggested that the Committee would need to see the results of the study of the potential value of the properties under various disposition scenarios. Mr. Spangler, however, stated that it was reasonable to ask the School Department to determine, by the end of this summer, whether it might need any space in the Parmenter or the Crosby under certain circumstances. He stated that as part of its study the School Department would need to take into account increasing kindergarten enrollments and the ongoing effort to bring more out-of-district special education placements back into the district. Mr. Spangler noted that School Department policy (FA/FB/FBB) requires the school administration to make enrollment and long term space needs projections to the School Committee each year. [Note: The policy calls for a report each March. School Committee minutes do not indicate a report being made in March of 2008.]

• Mr. Sullivan said that the guarantee on use of the proceeds would be achieved through a Town Meeting vote. He suggested it might also be possible to achieve that guarantee through votes of the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and Capital Planning Committee.

• Mr. Spangler said he understood the timing issue. To get Town Meeting votes on the use of the proceeds and on the sale of the buildings, with a School Committee vote in between to declare the building(s) permanently surplus, within the bounds of a single Annual Town Meeting could be logically challenging. But Mr. Spangler was uncertain whether the votes of the Board and other two committees would offer sufficient guarantees, and suggested this should be revisited later in the year.

• Ms. Sheffler pointed out that several schools were overcrowded with a number of art, science, and music classrooms being used for regular classrooms rather than for the purpose for which they were designed. This would need to be taken into account by the School Department when it does its space evaluation, which should look at this bigger picture, in terms of any possible plans for redistricting in the future.

• Ms. Sheffler asked how "highest and best use" was determined. Was it purely what would generate the most revenue from the sale of the buildings? Were other non-economic factors taken into account such as the number of families in the community that would benefit from the use of the facilities? Building additional condos, for example, would have other impacts on the neighborhood (e.g., parking and traffic) that should also be factored in. Mr. Thielman suggested that a study of "highest and best use" should probably be envisioned as a matrix of uses and potential dollar values.

• Mr. West explained that the first step in the valuation process was to determine exactly what the site is for each school. Does it include the building only or also the parking lots and playgrounds? Are there restrictions? Are there easements? Are there limitations by zoning bylaw to development? Are there parking restrictions? Could the sales have conditions attached that would enable the school department to lease back space, if needed?—how might such arrangements affect the sales price? Mr. Spangler pointed out that value added from the *mix* of educational diversity and the cultural institutions/programs by the current tenants are benefits to the community that should be weighed in determining the "highest and best use" of these properties. A consultant would want community input, and s/he would present various options for the disposition of the building.

• Mr. Sullivan said that a decision on the sale of the facilities would ultimately be made by Town Meeting.

• Mr. Sullivan proposed establishing a Crosby/Parmenter Advisory Committee that would include one representative each from the Board of Selectmen, the Arlington Redevelopment Board, Finance Committee, School Committee, School Facilities Working Group, Capital Planning Committee and the general public. The charge of the Committee would be to provide advice and input to the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen, focusing on the ownership and potential impacts of the highest and best uses, particularly the impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods and future town needs; and to recommend ways to optimize those impacts through any limitations or restrictions on the transfer of the properties.

• Mr. Spangler suggested that the Advisory Committee's charge include a timeline, and he recommended that the School Committee vote to support the establishment of the Advisory Committee after the Board of Selectmen takes such a vote. Mr. Spangler said that if a draft were available by the end of this week, it could be included in the School Committee packet that is distributed to SC members on Friday and discussed by the full School Committee on Tuesday, June 24th as part of the Community Relations Subcommittee report.

• The Subcommittee, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Sullivan, Mr. West, and Mr. Berry sketched out the following DRAFT timeline:

Ø By September 30, 2008, the School Department will determine if there are any scenarios under which it might need space in either the Parmenter or Crosby schools to house programs of the Arlington Public Schools. Some of this information is pending with the Massachusetts School Building Authority—Arlington's assessment of need may differ from the state's.

Ø As soon as the School Department completes its planning process and by no later than October 1st, the Town Manager will begin a process to value properties under various use scenarios, including partial use by the Arlington Public Schools under, e.g., a leaseback arrangement. A consultant would be hired, would seek community input, and would assemble a valuation report with a number of options for the use of the facilities. The objective would be to complete the process by December 31, 2008.

Ø From January 1, 2009 through the start of Town Meeting, a warrant article addressing the disposition of the buildings would be drafted, and public forums held to gather community input on a decision to sell either or both properties. The consultant's report would be reviewed by members of the public and members of elected bodies.

Ø Prior to the start of Town Meeting, votes on a proposal to dispose of the two properties would be taken by the Finance Committee, Capital Planning Committee, Redevelopment Board, School Facilities Working Group, the Parmenter/Crosby

Advisory Committee, and the Board of Selectmen. Pending the outcome of the valuation report, the Town Manager said he would recommend that each board vote that proceeds from the sale of the two buildings be used to finance improvements of the Thompson and Stratton elementary schools. It was noted that a “Yes” vote by all of these boards to dedicate proceeds from the sale(s) of the building(s) to Thompson and Stratton would send a strong public signal.

Ø Following the votes of the boards mentioned above and prior to a vote on the floor of Town Meeting to authorize disposition of the building(s), the School Committee would take a vote to declare the properties permanent surplus, effective by a date certain. It is possible, however, that School Committee members may want to wait until Town Meeting votes to say where funds from a sale of the buildings will go before it would vote to make the buildings permanent surplus.

· Mr. Thielman said he was comfortable with this decision but wanted lots of public input throughout the process. He said the report from the consultant would need to be reviewed carefully as well. Offers of some of the current tenants to buy one or both of the buildings would have to be considered as well, and there would need to be ample time for public conversation—the more we all know about the various scenarios, impact on the neighborhoods, the state of the market, and the overall picture of the distribution of students in other schools, the better. He cautioned that the Community Relations Subcommittee could not speak for the entire School Committee on any matter, including the process of addressing the surplus space issue. Ms. Sheffler asked how the consultant would be chosen, and it was pointed out that the selection procedure is [probably] outlined in the Town By-laws.

· Mr. Thielman asked if the other members of the subcommittee were comfortable with the timetable laid out above, and they said that in general the timetable was acceptable, though Mr. Spangler said he cannot commit at this time to a timetable that calls for the School Committee to vote to declare the buildings permanent surplus before Town Meeting takes a vote indicating what will be done with the proceeds of the sale of the buildings. He said it may be more appropriate for the School Committee to take a vote to declare the buildings permanent surplus after a Town Meeting vote.

· Mr. Sullivan said that the proposal to establish the Advisory Committee would be considered by the Board of Selectmen on July 14th. Mr. Thielman said the School Committee was meeting on July 24th, the Community Relations Subcommittee would try to meet between July 14th and July 24th, and the full School Committee could be prepared to take a vote to endorse a resolution/motion adopted by the Board of Selectmen.

3. State Aid Task Force

· Mr. Thielman reported that on Thursday, June 12, 2008, at BOS Chair Clarissa Rowe’s invitation, he attended a meeting at Town Hall regarding various Arlington-related funding requests before the Legislature. Meeting attendees included the town’s legislative delegation, four members of the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager and the Assistant Town Manager. Mr. Thielman explained that he was asked if the School Committee’s top priority was funding for the Arlington Youth Consultation Center (AYCC). While he answered in the affirmative and personally concurred with the decision to push for AYCC funding, he said it occurred to him that there should be an internal School Committee process whereby the full Committee has a chance to discuss and prioritize needs before the Legislature.

· Mr. Spangler and Ms. Sheffler agreed. Mr. Spangler said that individual School Committee members were having conversations with legislators on particular issues but it was not done with the force of a formal vote of the full School Committee.

· Mr. Thielman asked Mr. Sullivan what had happened with the State Aid Task Force, and Mr. Sullivan said that it had not met in a while. Mr. Sullivan agreed to try to call a meeting over the summer. He said it would be appropriate to discuss Arlington’s ideas for changing the formula for Chapter 70 at a summer meeting.

· Ms. Sheffler urged Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Thielman and the rest of the State Aid Task Force to simply state what it wanted changed in the Chapter 70 formula that unfairly hurt Arlington. She did not feel that the State Aid Task Force should *ask* the legislative delegation what was politically feasible or realistic. State what needs to be changed in the formula and push for it, she said. Don’t water down the request because legislators think a change in the formula is not realistic (because they are also factoring in what their constituents in *other* towns they may represent want from the state). She said we should tell them what we want and let them worry about the politics. Mr. Thielman and Mr. Spangler agreed. Mr. Sullivan said he was comfortable with this approach as well. He, Mr. Spangler, and Mr. Thielman noted that Arlington is one of only about 17 communities in the state that are now receiving state aid below the amounts received in 2002. Arlington gets not quite 17.5% of its basic school needs funded by the state, whereas other towns get as much as 90% from the state.

· Mr. Thielman said he saw a need for direction from the School Committee to its representatives on the State Aid Task Force, Denise Burns and himself. He would like to see a process in which the State Aid Task Force discussed and enumerated the Town’s legislative priorities, including School Department priorities, and those priorities (at least as they relate to the schools) were discussed and approved by the full School Committee. Mr. Thielman said he understood that the delegation and each individual Representative or Senator had the right to advocate for earmarks and projects that he felt were in the best interest of the town and the most politically feasible. This “push back” did not preclude a vote on legislative priorities by the full School Committee, however.

· Mr. Spangler and Ms. Sheffler said they agreed with this approach.

4. Request from Rose Udics

· Rose Udics, a parent, attended the meeting and asked the Community Relations Subcommittee to look into a fee-based summer enrichment program for high school students. She said that many students were benefiting from the after-school program

at the Ottoson but such a program did not exist at the high school level.

• The enrichment program(s) Ms. Udics envisions would be for students at all levels (College Prep through Honors), particularly students not often enrolled in 8th-grade ACE or HS AP classes *nor* in immediate danger of failing. She said she was speaking on behalf of parents at all levels. The idea is to provide a student with individual attention to master skills or content while studying something new/different—along the lines of the ACE program or The Writers' Express camps (based at Simmons College). Core programs could run during the school year in the evenings (as a "tutoring center" for content review or skill building), but with the greater variety of creative courses or modules offered during the summer.

• Ms. Udics noted that the current Writing Center at the HS is available during the school year/day only to a small number of "struggling students."

• She suggested that this might be addressed through the Community Education Program or the high school principal.

• Mr. Thielman agreed to discuss this request with Superintendent Levenson.

The meeting adjourned at 5:48 p.m. Motion by Mr. Spangler, second by Ms. Sheffler. Approved 3-0.

Next Meeting: Monday, July 7th at 3:00 p.m.

Contact Information of Attendees to today's meeting

Name	Affiliation	Email
Brian Sullivan	Town Manager	bsullivan@town.arlington.ma.us
Andy West	Chairman, Arlington Redevelopment Board	apwest@rcn.com
Kevin J. O'Brien	Director of Planning	kobrien@town.arlington.ma.us
David A. Berry	Assistant Director of Planning	dberry@town.arlington.ma.us
Rose Udics	Parent	udigom@rcn.com